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ABSTRACT

Everything taught as rhetoric today can be traced to Aristotle, but his rhetoric needs to be updated. The five elements of his rhetoric--invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery--were designed for public orators, but rhetoric has since come to mean the written rather than the spoken word. Peter Ramus redefined rhetoric in the sixteenth century, leaving style as its sole element, and Victorian rhetoricians later resurrected invention and arrangement. Since memory is the written word, and delivery incorporates penmanship and mechanics, Aristotle's complete rhetoric is appropriate for writing, but has not kept pace with changes in instruction. The classical orator had a subject, a purpose, and an audience for this speech. Today's students are assigned papers with no purpose, subject, or audience, thus reducing invention to choosing a topic. Classical arrangement is designed to help a listener follow an oral argument, but a reading audience can follow more complex arrangements by referring back or rereading. Modern authors seldom use the classical arrangement, but many composition texts still offer only this ear-directed arrangement for eye-directed writing. Ramus was correct in that rhetoric does essentially deal with style. Aristotle's rhetoric needs to be modified to structure an effective writing style that appeals to both eyes and ears. (HTW)

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RAMUS REVISITED

THE USES AND LIMITS OF CLASSICAL RHETORIC

All that we teach as rhetoric today can be traced, in a more or less straight line, back to Aristotle. His concepts, his schemata, still shape our methods in the composition classroom. Aristotle has survived because he is, in so many respects, so right. But his rhetoric needs to be updated--and, I would argue, not always along the lines of recent rhetorical developments. A brief history of those developments will explain why I am dissatisfied.

Aristotle designed a rhetoric for public orators, and his five-part division serves them well: invention, the discovery of the best arguments to support a given case before a given audience; arrangement, the most effective structure to help the audience follow the speech; style, the clearest, or most vigorous, or most moving choice of words to achieve the speaker's purpose; memory, the ability not only to "learn the speech," but to call forth, spontaneously, added examples and quotations to buttress an argument; and delivery, the melding of words, voice, and gesture into a total presentation of rhetorical power. Public speakers can still turn with profit to Aristotle.

But especially since the Renaissance, rhetoric has come to mean more and more the study of the written, rather than the spoken, word. Two parts of Aristotle's five were quickly neglected: memory and delivery. Then in the sixteenth century, Peter Ramus redefined rhetoric by transferring invention and arrangement to dialectics, the study of argumentation. Thus, the sole element of Ramian rhetoric was style. The results of this radical surgery can be seen in the overblown eupheuistic prose of John Lyly, or in Elizabethan rhetoric books with their listings of one hundred sixty-odd tropes and schemes.

Ramus's revision was not universally accepted. By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, arrangement, at least, was again firmly part of rhetoric. We still recognize the four modes of Victorian rhetoricians--description, narration, exposition, and argumentation. And we still have their eight, or ten, or whatever, patterns of development--definition, division, classification, comparison, and all the rest. And now, in the last twenty years, invention has also been reunited with rhetoric, sometimes under its Greek name, heuristics, sometimes under its process name, pre-writing, and sometimes simply as invention.

Actually, the rhetoric of writing involves not only invention, arrangement, and style. It also includes memory and delivery. Memory is the written word itself, as Plato pointed out in the Phaedrus. Delivery incorporates penmanship

or typography, format, and all those items like mechanics, spelling, grammar, and usage that fall under the rubric of "correctness." Delivery, incidentally, carries perhaps more impact on the reading audience than we sometimes admit in our classrooms. But that's another story.

So Aristotle is once more complete in his five-part rhetoric. Since I believe that Aristotle is essentially right, why am I dissatisfied?

I am dissatisfied with some of the changes that have occurred as our attention has shifted from oratory to writing--changes with which rhetoric has not always kept pace. Let me begin with invention.

The classical orator was presented with a definite occasion for speech. The occasion contained a subject and a purpose: a given crime to prosecute or defend, a given policy to support or oppose, a given person to praise or blame. And the occasion also presented the orator with a definite audience to persuade. His task of invention was to discover the best means available to meet this particualr rhetorical situation of subject, audience, and purpose. And here, Aristotle's twenty-eight topoi provided the orator with a useful checklist of possible arguments.

Today, though, we teach the English Theme. And we teach it in a rhetorical vacuum--no subject, no audience, no purpose. Invention now means not so much finding supports to fit a case as finding the case itself--finding the answer to the student's

recurring question, "What shall I write about?" To help answer this question, modern rhetoricians have evolved dozens of aids to invention: rap sessions, meditations, and journals, free writing and pre-writing, pentads, nine-cell heuristics, loopings, and blocks. Teachers spend valuable class time explaining these systems. And students spend valuable study time practicing them before every assigned theme.

To me, these are cures for a sickness of our own creation. First, we created the English theme. Then we had to create tricks to find the material to put in it.

Have we forgotten what Aristotle said--that rhetoric is not a subject, but a technique? That the technique is called into use only in an appropriate situation? That a rhetorical situation has within it a subject, an audience, and a purpose? Notice that in the real world, a writing requirement almost always contains a complete rhetorical situation. People in business or the professions, called upon to put something in writing, usually know what the subject must be, who the audience is, and what the report should accomplish. The only heuristic they need is a simple three-pronged quiz: what is my subject? who is my audience? what is my purpose? Then they devise an arrangement and a style compatible with the three answers--assuming they have been taught in an English class to analyze each of these three elements, separately and in combination, and then to arrange and style their resulting ideas.

Only in an English theme are these three elements usually missing. If students have little to say in their papers, it may be because freshman composition, like rhetoric, is not a subject, but a technique. And the theme, which may have no assigned topic, no audience other than the instructor, and no purpose other than to pass the course, becomes a sterile academic exercise of putting blank thoughts on blank pages. In this rhetorical non-situation, invention too often becomes a set of artificial activities designed to get words on paper, rather than what it could be--a genuinely useful flexing of our thought muscles. It is not my purpose here to suggest a better remedy for the problem of English themes. But I do suggest that the remedy is not necessarily an emphasis on invention.

Since, then, I believe that the current focus on teaching invention may be a somewhat contrived solution to a contrived dilemma, let me (with a slight qualm) emulate Ramus and lop the branch of invention off the tree of rhetoric. Do I also want to lop off the branch of arrangement, as he did? Theoretically, yes. Practically, no.

Much of what we now think of as arrangement actually derives from Aristotle's inventive <u>topoi</u>. I am referring to the familiar patterns of arrangement found in so many texts, the definition-comparison-classification-analysis litany that I cited earlier as part of our nineteenth-century heritage. Anthologies have culled out model paragraphs and even model

essays based on each of these patterns of arrangement. After students read them and study their organizations, they must use each pattern in a theme. Granted, the patterns are ways to write. More basically, though, they are ways to think. And they are ways to think not only about composition, but about history and physics, art and baseball. The human mind cannot function without comparing or classifying. Therefore, I agree with Ramus that these methods of thought do not belong to the province of rhetoric. Rather, they belong to the total world of knowledge.

Nonetheless, although these thought processes are in a sense automatic and even unavoidable, students should be made consciously aware of them. And composition classes seem to be as good a place as any in which to remind students of how they think. So, whether or not this modern concept of arrangement belongs within rhetoric, it does belong in freshman English.

Unlike its modern namesake, the classical concept of arrangement focused on the seven parts of an oration: introduction, narration, exposition, proposition, confirmation, confutation, and conclusion. This sequence is clearly designed to help a listening audience follow an oral argument. It teems with repetitions, restatements, familiar examples, expected patterns--clear characteristics of oral literacy. But a reading audience doesn't always need this excess of iteration. It can follow more complex, more sophisticated arrangements, because it can

turn back the pages for any necessary reinforcements or reminders. Modern authors seldom hew to the classical pattern. Yet many composition texts still offer only this ear-directed arrangement for eye-directed writing. Now, standard patterns of arrangement are often useful: they confirm reader expectations and thus ease the task of comprehension. So the classical sequence is not outdated. But it does need updating with examples of eye-directed arrangement, those novel and effective arrangements made possible through print and paper.

Winston Weathers has recently written a book that figuratively "opens our eyes." It's called An Alternate Style, published by the Hayden Press. Every English instructor should read it. Weathers advocates crots, labyrinthine sentences, sentence fragments, lists, the double-column "double voice," puns, orthographic variations, and the slash and dash as methods to gain a desired tone or force or resonance. Many of these devices involve a creative playing with typography that would utterly confuse a listener. But they work with a reader. Sometimes irritating, always stimulating, Weather's provocative patterns do not replace traditional arrangement; they supplement it. And in so doing, they strikingly illustrate what I mean by a rhetoric for writing that appeals to the reader's eye as well as to the listener's or reader's ear.

Weather's title--An Alternate Style--brings us to the third element of rhetoric, style. His suggested variations in syntax, spelling, and punctuation are clearly matters of

style. But a writer's style is also visible in larger elements of prose--in arrangement, tone, attitudes toward the subject and the audience--in all those considerations that converge in the total piece of writing. I personally accept as a definition of style the confluence of all the linguistic and rhetorical options that the writer selects in order to achieve the greatest effectiveness for a given end. In a very real sense, style determines invention and arrangement. If this definition seems to imply that style _is_ rhetoric, I am only mildly uncomfortable. For I do believe that style is by all odds the most important element of rhetoric, the element that controls all aspects of writing, the element that we should stress in our composition classes. As Richard Lanham, in _Style: An Anti-Textbook_, says of composition, "Its natural subject is style."

But if style is paramount in rhetoric, what implications arise? For one thing, we must reexamine the familiar argument of process-_vs_.-product.

To teach invention requires an emphasis on the composing process. To teach style requires an emphasis on the composed product. Obviously, style can be observed and commented upon only in the written paper. Though style develops through the process of writing, it is visible only in the product. Thus it is the written product that should receive the informed attention of an instructor.

The writing _process_ has lately been getting much

attention in our conventions and publications. Psycholinguists and composition investigators have uncovered fascinating insights into the composing processes of both students and professional authors. As yet, though, what goes on in a writer's mind remains essentially a black box. And I'm not convinced that what has so far been discovered is concrete enough to enter our textbooks and teaching methods. But it has entered--ready or not.

Process is idiosyncratic. Some students write best following the "proper" recursive stages of thinking, drafting, and revising, interspersed with adequate incubation time. Other students write best under the pressure of a last-minute deadline. But do their processes really matter? All that we can ever judge are their products. Granted, we can and should offer some guidelines on process. But we shouldn't force all students to follow a set method. Cognitive styles differ. A writing process that helps one student might totally hamstring a second. Granted also, we can and should examine the product at varying stages of drafts and revisions. We needn't focus only on the so-called "finished product." In the final analysis, though, the products of writing--words on paper--are the only things we can respond to. How those words reached the paper may be an interesting puzzle for the psychologist. But it is inherently beyond the direct influence of the composition instructor.

Someday, of course, the composing process may become an open book. I hope not, though. I rather cherish my

personal, peculiar, perverse creative process; and how it works is nobody's business--not even mine.

Style manifested in the written product--this, then, is where I believe our rhetorical efforts should focus. I shan't go into all that this entails in the classroom--the forging of effective sentences, the use of creative punctuation, the control of tone, the balancing of the rhetorical demands of a given writing situation. I maintain, though, that all of these things are teachable and that they are all subsumed under one heading: style.

So I suggest that Ramus was right, after all. Rhetoric does deal essentially with style. But not just with the style of tropes and schemes. We need a twentieth-century Ramus to help us understand and to some extent systematize a modern style, a modern rhetoric, based on modern printed prose, aimed at modern readers, treating modern ideas. We can still learn much from Aristotle, especially in the field of effective oratory. But for effective writing. we should selectively prune and modify Aristotle to take full advantage of the visual power of print. I by no means wish to minimize the importance of sound in prose, the rhythms and stresses that hit a reader's inner ear. But a modern rhetoric should appeal to <u>two</u> senses. Aristotle designed his rhetoric solely for the ears. In writing, words must travel through the eye to reach the ear. Eye appeal counts in a rhetoric of style.

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